

# The King's Cup-Bearer

The Reverend Thomas William Holmes

An Appreciation by William Wilkinson

Trinity Parish, New York

Holmes, T.





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THE KING'S CUP BEARERS



## An Address in Wall Street at the Daily Noon Service

**M**R. WILKINSON said:—"Ever since I was a boy, and all through my young manhood, on to my declining years, God has singularly blessed me in giving me friends of high character—men wise in council, tender in sympathy, vigorous and strong in action; men who have been to me and to others as lights in dark places, a joy and a crown of glory.

Amongst these, no one has been more useful than my honored friend, the Reverend Thomas William Holmes, of Sheffield, England. When in 1881 I first came to America, he came with me to Victoria Station, Sheffield. He was then one of the busiest clergymen in the North of England, well-known and honored by men whose honor is praise. I was in poor health, threatened with serious disease, and ordered into a cold climate. I was a poor man, and struggling. My wife and my children were about me. I had to leave them, for the time, in the land of their birth. Mr. Holmes and his wife, and a well-known educator, Professor Whitehead (who is now one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace), and his wife showed kindness for a whole year to my family. Their kindness is written on my heart.

I had known Mr. Holmes from the days when I was an apprentice. He was born in Sheffield. He had the education of an artist and of an architect. He had lived in Rome, Italy, and copied carefully many of the works of men of renown, in that city of matchless historical interest on the Tiber. He lived two years in France. Paris he knew. The language of its people he understood as well as a Frenchman. He spoke it perfectly. Fearing God and loving men, and being persuaded that the spiritual is the true and the abiding, and that the eternal things are of transcendent importance, he prepared for the holy ministry. To preach the gospel was his delight, and to him it was an ever resounding joy. He was ten years my senior. Across a chasm fifty years wide, I hear him preaching on the spreading and useful power of good character. This text was Genesis, chapter forty-ninth, verse twenty-two: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well: whose branches run over the wall." It was a noble testimony to the value and diffusive power of personal goodness and of the blessing of the God of Jacob upon it. As the preacher pictured it, shown in the life of Joseph, goodness stood before my enraptured mind, transfigured and glistening, full of glory. Slight in build, not tall, but graceful as an old Greek, when animated, his eyes glistened like stars in an autumnal sky; his voice was musical as a silver bell, and as used, it gave a singular charm to his message

which made the most cultivated of his hearers hearken intently. I next heard Mr. Holmes lecture on the "Covenanters of Scotland," a subject which gave an arena in which he could for good exercise all the powers of his being. I see him standing up, I hear his opening sentence: "The Covenanters of Scotland, mark them well, for it is men and women such as they who are the glory of their times, and the honor of the nations." As the speaker goes on, I see the Covenanter as he leaves his solitary home, passes the moss-covered walls in grave silence with deep searchings of heart; he walks up the mountain as Moses walked up Nebo; or I see him as, with his "Bible in his heart," he walks down the glen to the appointed place of praise and prayer. I hear the voices of the men who truly are making covenant with God by sacrifice. There are no words by which I can tell what I feel and think. God knows—the just reward of these men is with the Almighty. The wickedness of religious persecution and the contemptible picture of the men who do it stand before me now. I, then not twenty years old, said to my father, who was a Baptist: "Father, we have heard great things to-day." He said: "Yes, remember them well, and for a long time; be sure that young man will not stay at Marsden" (a village seven miles out of Huddersfield); "he will soon be called to a larger work; he is an able man, and he has the true root of the matter in him." So it came to pass, but from that village, as



I know, and now violate no confidence in saying, he sent forth a mighty influence. He was a writer for the *Huddersfield Examiner* Newspaper. Mr. Joseph Woodhead was its owner and editor in chief. A man of high ideals and varied power for good, he became Member of Parliament for Spen Valley. I owe much to Mr. Woodhead, as he gave me my first opportunity of writing for the press. Mr. Holmes was a leader writer and book reviewer for the *Sheffield Independent* for many years. This was his recreation and it brought him useful gold. It was at this time, when he had settled in the steel metropolis of Yorkshire, I went to worship in his church. The service was uplifting; I noticed the singing was all of a kind, on the fulness of pardon, on the solid satisfaction a man has in the knowledge of pardoned sin. The lessons were of like import, the Thanksgivings on like lines. Sermon time came. Mr. Holmes said simply: "I will preach on Comfort for all believers in and Servants of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Turn to psalm number ninety—read the eighth verse, 'Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance'." I spoke within myself and said, "What a strange text for my friend to pick out of all available texts to preach a sermon upon, if the plan is to comfort anybody!" Mr. Holmes plainly, and with accelerating force, photographed secret sin in its pestilential work; its flight; its overthrow



of the noblest powers of man; of its damage in the world; of its shame and dishonor. How it draws a curtain between those who practise it and God, kills joy in the soul and is the foe of all that is good; as he went quietly on and closed each paragraph, I sat aghast, as I said, “ ’Tis true, all true, demonstrably true. But where does this perfect knowledge of God of all our hidden sin come in as comfort? To most persons, it stands as terror.” Mr. Holmes then said: “ You know the facts as I have set them before you; the comfort is in this, that in this complete knowledge God forgives sin, all of it. Hearken! ‘I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins’—a forgiveness and an obliteration of sins—all of them. Know this and your hearts shall be glad.” He then told us the number of the hymn, we sang unto the Lord—“O happy day, that fixed my choice on Thee, my Saviour and my God.” The effect was electrical, it was fire from the Altar of the Eternal flame—such a preacher must draw to his service elect souls. To him came men of distinction: Professor Henry Bradley, now one of the editors of the New Oxford Dictionary; Professor Ripper, who was on the Mosely Commission to this Republic; others of local fame and service. Mr. Holmes was a man of the people, he knew ability and knowledge and office being explained meant, Responsibility, Stewardship; so he made the cause of the ignorant and

the poor his special care; to them he gave thought, work, and his hard-earned cash; he did not, as many did, and do, prate about liberty and degrade the maxims of a free man by the actions of a slave. A man of parts and power, he used all for the good of others, specially the children and young people—and his sweetest words were for the wayward, in order to gain them for goodness. Sixteen times in as many years I have spent my holidays in company with Mr. Holmes – we went to the Truant School each year; there Mr. Holmes was always in full fine feather and singing form. As we drove to it he said: “Now, Wilkinson, tell them, as you know how, some true story of some boy who was a scapegrace, who came to a good resolution and lived to be a useful man; that will captivate and hearten them, poor little chaps!” This we did, to the delight of the lads. Mr. Holmes was zealous and active in all educational matters in Sheffield, whether Elementary, Collegiate, or University; he was for more than twenty years a member of the School Board. He took great interest in the colleges of Sheffield and in all questions concerning the higher education at the University. His own grandson, who bore his name and whose training Mr. Holmes supervised, was an honor man in the B. A. examination. In all this, Mr. Holmes never deflected from his own convictions; he differed from the very Rev. Dean Nolan, the Catholic on the School Board; and from Canon Sanford, the Episcopalian, and he

said so; but he had a profound respect for the character, service and sterling ability of these men and those whom they represented. It was this fearless leadership in its largeness which made the premier Duke of England when Lord Mayor of Sheffield and Queen Victoria was to visit it, when a list of the gentlemen to be presented to her Majesty was placed by the authorities of the city before him, on looking it over said, "I do not see the name of the Rev. Thomas William Holmes here; it ought to be." It was added—he was of course presented. Many may think as they hear or read this that it was because he was an intellectual and expert swordsman, that he was presented to the Queen. A dialectical gladiator, a man who contended for his faith, this he was; but it was as king's cup-bearer that he was strongest; he was a guide and a comforter, a friend, wise in counsel in days of stress. The seven charities named by Jesus he held sacred; to visit the sick, to practise helpful works, was joy to him; and it was this he most admired in others when he heard them described. When the Vicar of Sheffield, Archdeacon Eyre, was buried, the Archbishop of York gave the address. Mr. Holmes said: "It was perfect, because it gave credit to the departed for exactly the qualities by which he was and will be known. Rich in good works, rich in the esteem of good men, he fell asleep, and was not, for God took him to the rest and the joy that abideth." As a



tribute of love, as a small acknowledgment of friendship and of help, I speak this, and I put it into print so that his children and their children may know how I look at the life of my friend and that they may add to his triumphs new deeds of service.

110 Banner Road  
SHEFFIELD  
Sept. 22, 1914

MY DEAR OLD FRIENDS :

My wife and I join in thanking you for your beautiful card and hope that you may reach your Diamond Wedding Day.

It seems sometimes only a short time since you, Thomas, and I on dark nights came across Scholes Moor when I had been preaching at Hepworth or Jackson Bridge—the impression is more vivid than things that happened ten years ago; and among the pleasantest memories of my life is your companionship in those happy days.

I can see the places now as plainly as if they were before my eyes. I can hear old Mr. Lindley's sonorous "grace before meat" in a voice as dignified as if he were an Archbishop. I can hear Ben Stanley's comical stories of how he played tricks on Wesleyan Ministers returning from a supper at the close of the Sunday at old Mr. Garside's, and hear him recite his own poetry.

I can see David Fallas with his heart on fire with beautiful zeal for his Master, singing at a Love Feast in an ecstasy of joy, and old Jim Midgley setting the tunes in a cottage at Cinderhills, and for the first time after fifty years making a mistake of setting a short metre tune for a long metre hymn. They are all gone into a world of light. Bless them—their memory is

sweet—and you after a long and honoured ministry still spared.

May God's richest blessing crown the sunset before the heavenly sun rise. Warm love from both of us, for you both.

T. W. HOLMES

I print this letter to show what a companionable man Mr. Holmes was. The Rev. Thomas Hornheap is a retired Congregational minister, seventy-five years old, a friend of mine.





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